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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE HEAVENLY STATE.

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.—MATT. xxii., 30.

You will recollect that this is a part of the discussion, or series of discussions, which grew up in Jerusalem, and during the progress of which every one of the schools, and almost every one of the factions had their turn in propounding to Christ their difficult questions. The philosophy of the Jews consisted largely to the whole Oriental people, of puzzles, and riddles, and enigmas, and proverbs, and dark sayings—little curiosities of ingenuity which represented no solid and substantial truth.

Here is a specimen of the way in which they taught—for this was considered to be very sound by the profound of the Sadducees, who did not believe that there was resurrection; who professed to follow conscientiously the Jewish Scriptures, and to be the truest of the representatives of Moses and his institutes. According to the system of the Jews, by which the property was to be kept in the several families of the tribe, if a man died, his widow was taken to his next brother, and she became his wife; for polygamy was permitted, in the early Jewish history, at any rate. So they propounded a case. There were seven brothers, and in turn they all conveniently died, for the purpose of the story, and the woman passed from one to another, and became, in succession, according to this system of the Jews, the wife of each. "Now," say they, "in the other life whose shall she be?—for all seven had her." The answer of the Saviour was this, substantially: "You are a set of ignorant fools!" It was couched in other language, but it came to that. He said, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." It was saying, in other words, "Ye blunder; and the ignorance of your stupid blunder is two-fold—first, from a want of knowledge of your own Scriptures, and second, from a lack of understanding the law of things—the everlasting law of nature—that is, the power of God." "For," said he, "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God."

SUNDAY MORNING, Oct. 9, 1870. LESSON: REV. V. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection) NOS. 1258, 1272, "Shining Shore."

Well, how is that? He did not say. He likened them to the angels, but did not tell us how the angels were. It was rather negative. He declared that one potential, universal part of the economy of human life, with all its incidents and concomitants, stopped at the grave. This is the part of man out of which multitudinous history, good and bad, is derived. But useful as it is, it ceases and does not go on into the other life; and it seems very natural, since man is a double being, born for this lower life, in transition and formation for a life to come, that a portion of the powers or faculties which fit him especially for this lower life, when they shall have performed their function, will, as it were, like the calyx of a flower, wither and fall back, and that into the other life we shall carry only those parts of our nature which are highest and noblest, and which have relation to the spiritual rather than to the physical.

Therefore the reply of our Master to this question in reference to the future state is not only remarkable for what it says, but is quite as remarkable for what it leaves unsaid. For both here and everywhere you will be struck, when you come to analyze it in the light of modern inquiries and modern knowledges, with how little is actually taught us in respect to the other state, in the Bible. It is declared that Christ "brought life and immortality to light," as he did; but he certainly did not reveal them in all their metes and bounds, nor in their regnant philosophy.

It is affirmed here that the Old Testament recognizes the existence of men after death. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." He knew that they were Sadducees, and that they held the doctrine that there was no resurrection of the dead, and therefore no immortality; and they based it on the Scriptures. And his declaration to them that they erred in that philosophy, because they did not understand the Old Testament Scripture on which it was based, must, it seems to me, be taken as affirming that in his judgment the Old Testament Scriptures did recognize a future existence. This may seem strange to any who have never thought of it; but an examination of the question will show you that it almost required some such affirmation as this to give us liberty to believe that the Old Testament Scriptures did teach any such thing. For the question of continued existence is only *recognized* in the Old Testament. It is not taught there. And from the beginning of that first dispensation to the end of it; from the opening chapter of Genesis to the closing chapter of the record of the Old Testament; the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, of immortality in bliss or in penalty in the other life, is never once explicitly taught. But a great many times it is recognized. And you will perceive that this makes a great deal of differ-

ence. There can be no question, it seems to me, that a dim faith did exist.

The reasoner who wrote the Hebrews—Apollos, probably—is arguing on the subject of the faith of the patriarchs, when he declares that they endorsed what they did, not with reference to things seen, but with reference to something coming; and it indicates that they had a glimmer of faith. It breaks out still stronger in the Psalms; and in the later prophets it becomes more and more luminous. And if the question were this, Is it to be believed that the advanced moral spirits of the Old Testament history had a faith of continued existence; and that this continued existence followed the two lines of joy and sorrow, according to the foregoing character, then I think there should be no two opinions about it. And I believe they did have these glimpses and these intimations. But then, were these truths ever wrought into authoritative statements, and by inspiration made to be part and parcel of the truth, touching all the institutes of Moses and the prophets? No, no; nowhere; not once. So far from it, you may read the first five books of Moses through from beginning to end, and you shall not find one hint of it. It is an astounding fact, that that economy for the government of nations and men, including both their political and religious institutions and their history—the whole Mosaic economy—lies open before us, and there is not a single instance in which a motive is addressed to man drawn from his immortality. There is not in the Old Testament a single instance in which an authoritative motive is addressed to the human heart, saying, "If you do this, you will after death be punished;" nor is there a single instance in which it is said, "If you live thus, after death you shall go on forever and forever."

There were men in the Old Testament times who believed, but it never became a part of the authoritative canon; and never was it a sanction, either of joy or sorrow, in the Old Testament way of teaching men. On the contrary, all the motives were drawn from secular things. Virtue shall bring in this life its reward, and wickedness shall bring its punishment—that is the key-note of that sublime drama of Job in which, arguing from that basis, the friends of Job said to him, "Since wickedness is punished in this life, and virtue in this life is rewarded, and since you are horribly punished, it must be that you have been horribly wicked. And it is quite in vain for you to say that you have not been, and to appeal to your open life. You have been a hypocrite, and have hid your conduct, and God has found it out; and that is the reason why you are now suffering." We would suppose that under such circumstances Job would have said, at once, "Good conduct in this life does not always get its reward, but waits for it until the life to come." We should suppose that Job would have said,

"Here, we are in a growing state, and we only come to the leaf or the blossom at best: in the other life, we come to the fruit." But in answer to the charge that he must be wicked, because rewards and punishments were confined to this life, we should suppose that Job, if he had known it, would have said indignantly, not only that the charge was false, but that the reasoning upon which the charge was based was also false. You could not imagine a modern Job. You could not imagine a man in our day who would rest under such a charge as that. Ten thousand men live in these times, borne down by obloquy, made dark by suffering, denied everything that life has to make it sweet and noble; and yet you and I revere them. Why? "Ah!" we say, "they bear sorrow and suffering for virtue's sake; and their coronation shall come hereafter." But Job's future is black. There is not a single luminous point in that direction in the whole book of Job. And the Old Testament economy, while its saints did unquestionably recognize, individually, for themselves, the truth of continued existence after death, and had some vague notion of virtue, never took that great truth up into itself as a part of its doctrine, and never wrought it into its theology, and never made it a canon or a motive from beginning to end.

A great many men ask whether a man can be a Universalist, and be a Christian. Let them first ask the question, "How could it be that God should ordain an economy in which the doctrine of future rewards and punishments was never once taught?"

This reply of our Saviour, I repeat, is remarkable in what it says, and it is remarkable, also, in what it leaves unsaid. That will be unfolded in the progress of this discourse. For I proceed, after these prefatory remarks, to speak of the general method of Christ and his disciples, in the new dispensation, of teaching us concerning the great future. What was the method of instruction adopted by Christ and his disciples, in regard to those principles that in his hands first came into authoritative disclosure, and were taught as positive truth?

1. They did not undertake to teach specifically or philosophically or physiologically, respecting the heavenly state. There is no attempt in the New Testament to determine whether heaven is a condition or a place. That is left for our modern speculation. There is nothing taught in the Old Testament history with regard to the relations of this condition or place to the universe,—nothing specific; nothing definite; nothing that enlightens us in regard to the New Jerusalem; nothing which answers to the instruction given later in respect to the promised land to which we are going.

Christ and the apostles did not unfold the internal economy of the heavenly state. There is no account given of its materials, of its econ-

omies, of its occupations, of its government, and of the real, unfigurative flow of the experience of those that are there. You may misunderstand the statement as I now give it, but you will not when I shall have done with it.

A thousand questions, therefore, are not answered, which thousands of not unnaturally inquisitive spirits now ask respecting the heavenly state. What changes will pass upon our own nature?—this is an inquiry which many would fain have solved. Instructed more in psychology, we reason more in respect to that which relates to ourselves. We have more knowledge to base reasoning upon than the ancients. What will be the effect of death upon these minds? Are we to go into the heavenly state in these bodies? Paul declares expressly, No. "Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God." According to his declaration, there shall be a form which corresponds to these bodies, though it shall not be these bodies. And how one can believe in the absolute resurrection of a physical body, I cannot understand, when the apostle bars all such ideas as that, by explicitly declaring that there shall be no flesh and blood in the kingdom of God. Take all my flesh and blood away, and I think there would be very little of me left for heaven. And that phrase was meant, unquestionably, to exclude physical matter. But what shall be the bodies that are to be like our present bodies, but shall not be these bodies? You know as well as I, or anybody else, that has not been taught.

If one has sent from his arms an infant child, do not you suppose he has followed that child with myriads of thoughts? How will it find its way there? Will the angels know it and take care of it? Will it be an infant when it reaches heaven? Will it grow as it would have grown if it had remained upon the earth? What is the history of children that go to heaven? There is not a line that throws any light upon these questions in the New Testament.

Will friendships continue there? There are intimations, I do not doubt. I do not doubt that there are a great many things bearing upon this subject which are taught in the New Testament, as I shall show you by and by. But there is not one single line in the New Testament which explicitly states any thing about it.

What will be our employments in the heavenly land? Nothing is said about it. For, surely, we do not suppose that the figures of the Apocalypse, some of which I read this morning in your hearing, were meant to represent the absolute employment of the redeemed, and that we are to be set up in ranks, and at stated times make bows, and, all the rest of the time, sing. A man must have gone crazy upon symbolism to suppose anything like that. The employments of the heavenly state are not revealed to us. In short, the questions raised here in

regard to our future condition are answered mostly thus, "Ye do not understand the power of God, and the scriptures, in regard to the resurrection." St. John, the very one who wrote the Apocalypse, with all its magnificent figures, after declaring in flaming zeal, "We are the sons of God," said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." St. Paul, in speaking of that very thing, said, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then"—then only—"face to face." And in the Apocalypse, where some figures most touching, because drawn from the very depth of human experience, are employed, it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Great change!

So you will see—and you will see a great deal more specially than I can make it appear by this brief representation, if you will follow up your researches—that it is not the method of Christ or his disciples to give what may be considered philosophical or physiological knowledge covering the whole ground of the nature of heaven, or the nature of our occupations and conditions when we shall reach it.

2. We are not, however, to suppose that the heavenly existence is practically annihilated, and all comfort taken from the belief of it, because it is left vague. On the contrary (not to insist, as by and by I shall more particularly, upon the fact that it is impossible for us to understand these things till we reach a different point of unfolding) I affirm that the methods by which these great truths and realities are actually taught, are better adapted to promote effort, and zeal, and endurance than they ever would have been if laid open, analyzed and set forth, in specific form, with reference to details and principles. For they are now addressed to our imagination.

Is that, do you say, more unsatisfying? Nay, it is the way in which children learn all things that are above them. For the imagination is the very door through which the child learns, before it emerges from childhood, the things which are beyond it. It is the very way in which common, ignorant people help themselves, where they have no science, and no special knowledge.

I have sat on the summit of Mount Holyoke, and looked out over the Connecticut Valley, and seen as entrancing views as ever comforted the heart of man, poet though he might be; and yet, if you had asked me, "What is in that field?" I could not have told you whether it was wheat, or rye, or grass, or corn. If you had asked me "What is that village?" I could not have told you. I could just see a white glimmer among the green trees, but that was all. If you had asked me, "Who are those men working yonder?" or "What are they doing?" I could not have told you. I could see men that seemed to be

about the size of ants crawling over the surface of the ground; but whether they were mowing, or hoeing, or walking, or running, I could not tell. The whole picture lay before me, magnificent, and quickened every spring of fancy, and comforted my heart; but I could not give much idea of its horticulture, or agriculture, or anything that went to make up the interior of its life.

A young man goes abroad, and finds in retirement the child of a noble mother, thoughtful, patient, gentle, true, most loving; with a nature which interprets all things; without much schooling, and yet wise; and he wins her; and she, a maid from the village, is to be carried home to his father's mansion—for he is a child of wealth, and lives afar off. She wonders, from day to day, as they travel, what that home shall be, until at last they draw near to it, and, leaving the cars, and taking other conveyance, they come in sight of the residence of his father. And on some fortunate hill-top, he stops and says, "Do you see, westering, just in front of that swell and roll of the forest, in the midst of those orchards and gardens, that white gleam? Do you see the gable which rises between those two trees, which the sun strikes, and from which the reflection comes so magnificently? That is my father's house." With those words, what a sense of its beauty, what a sense of its richness, what a thrill of delight, goes through her heart! Yet she has seen neither the mother, nor brother, nor sister; but all images are brewing in her mind. She sees a thousand things. When she goes there she will not see so many things with her eyes as now she sees by her imagination. She creates them. She fills the house. She fills the garden. She walks in thought through those cool arbored groves. She sees and multiplies the treasures of her future home. And when she gets there her visions will all fade. She probably will not have seen one thing right. Nevertheless, she will not be discontented nor disappointed. For the state in which she was, the imagination was abundantly sufficient; and when she got to the thing itself, the images which she had formed would not conflict one single particle with the realities.

Now, we are here as children, not competent to understand the things which lie in another life, beyond the reach of our experience. Therefore, all the instruction which is given to us on this subject is given to the reason through the imagination. All the instruction of the New Testament is given to us upon that method. It is the truth of God addressed to our hearts, I should say, through our imagination, rather than to our reason. As long as we are in this world our heaven will be imaginary. We can have no other here. There is a real heaven which is better than we imagine—which is larger, nobler, brighter, more blessed in every part; nevertheless, that heaven which you, and

I, and every saint on earth, think of, is purely imaginary. It is a picture which each one of us has drawn.

I repeat, that heaven is a revelation to a man's heart through his imagination—not through his sensuous reason. In other words, that principle by which God refines the world; that faculty, and that group of faculties, by which civilization has always made progress—viz., the imagination—is the gate and door between the flesh, matter, physics, on the one side, and spirit on the other.

The imagination, I think, is the angel of resurrection to the soul in the process of development. It is through the imagination that men learn to sublime matter into invisible forms, and fashion things not seen into things that are as if they were seen. It is by the imagination that one conceives of something better in every act than the thing itself; so that he is able to idealize moral excellences, so that they grow larger and larger in his conception. It is the refining element, the interpreting element, the inspiring element, that gives to every man aspiration. Because the imagination is not a measuring quality, because it is not a mathematical quality, because it has not exactitude, men despise it; and we are taught that it is fanciful, and that it is not safe to build on it. But I aver that in the economy of God's providence the human race has been instructed more through the imagination than through the reason. And it will be so to the end. And I aver that in respect to a range of topics that is more important to us than any other, it is the only teaching through which we can be instructed. It is not by statistics, but by the imagination, with pictures forever globing into new forms of beauty, forever changing, never twice alike, and yet always doing the one work—invigorating, inspiring, translating men higher and higher—that God teaches us things which we cannot reach through our experience, or otherwise know anything about.

This gives us the key to the scriptural teachings in regard to the future. They are addressed, as I have said, a little to the reason, but mostly to the heart, to the affections, through the imagination. The judgment scenes which are dramatically set forth in the Gospels are designed to be symbolic. I do not mean that they are pretences. I merely mean that the judgment itself, which I believe will take place, will not take place literally and statistically just as it is stated. The statement is a pictorial representation; but that pictorial representation was designed (and it has always answered that design) to raise up the conception of a transcendent finality in which justice and injustice, right and wrong, should part company, and take respectively their own spheres. The scene itself is pictorially represented. Not that these very things will happen; but that a scene will transpire which these symbolize, and which the imagination must enlarge and fill up, and vary as well.

This is specially true in respect to the conditions of heaven and hell, as they are set forth in the Bible. Neither of them is to be interpreted according to its figures literally. We are not to suppose that there is a place of literal fire and brimstone. I do not believe it; you do not believe it; and we ought not to believe it, any more than we believe that heaven is paved with golden paving stones. Nobody believes that literally. If men did believe it there would be more misers anxious for their souls' salvation! Heaven and hell are represented by such figures, not because they are literal representations, but because they are the things which will have most potential influence on the imagination. That is the key-note of Scripture teaching. No statistical methods are employed, but those methods which address themselves to man's creative faculties—to his fancy.

Let us look for a moment at heaven as we find it described in the Bible. Let us see what the method is by which it is set forth to us. In general, we are taught that man continues to exist hereafter, and that the good exist in a state of happiness, and that that place or condition is called *heaven*. But how much do we know about it, literally and technically? What do we know of its geography, its history, its philology, its industry, or its economic relations? How little we know! and yet how much we know! How large a space it occupies in our thoughts and feelings! and how much more power has it than this great globe on which we tread, if we are alert in our moral nature! All the figures which have power upon the human imagination have been sorted as it were, have been selected, and have been, in one way or another, employed in the New Testament to describe heaven. The thing itself is indescribable. We have no faculty nor means, by which to understand it. If the actual thing were stated to us, it would be as though it were not stated, because we cannot comprehend it; on the same principle that if I were to explain to my little three or four year old child the process of an eclipse, if I were to say to him, "Oh, the moon was going out one night, and it saw the sun, and it wanted to be roguish, and so it ran right before the sun, and threw the shadow of itself—a big cloak—all over the sun, and the sun did not like it a bit, and the moon laughed and ran on," the child would have some conception of an eclipse, although the figure is one of two roguish persons, one throwing his shadow over the other. But suppose, instead of that, I should make an exact calculation of the causes of the eclipse, and should show the figures to the child? In one case I would perfectly confound him by the truth; and in the other case I would enlighten him by fiction. A fiction is oftentimes nearer the truth than the truth itself—not absolutely, but relatively to the day and condition in which we are living. And there is no book in the world that

ever employed partial things, and fables, and parables, and make-believe truths, and beautiful stories wrought out of fancy, so much as the Bible—that very book which has fashioned so many good men who are afraid to read a novel. It is full from beginning to end of fiction for the sake of fact, because, in the relatively undeveloped state of the human mind, it is true that fiction oftentimes brings a man nearer to the truth, because it assimilates to something that he knew before, and always leads from that something which he knew before to something to be known; and it is the shadow of what you do know that throws its interpretation over to what you do not know.

All the experiences which the human race has evolved of power, of joy, of happiness, and of purity, are employed in the New Testament, like so many pigments, to make the great picture of the heavenly state. All that men have learned to estimate in riches is gathered up, and all the splendor that there is in art is employed, to throw light upon the heavenly state. All that there is that is impressive to the imagination of men, and august, in courts and crowns and sceptres—in short, all that there is in royalty; all the glory that there is in warriors, whether suffering or victorious, will be found in the list of the figures that represent the heavenly state. All the cheer of music goes up there. All the raptures of love report themselves there. All the beauty of trees and of gardens; all that there is in rivers and mountains; whatever there is in the city or in the country; nature itself—all these will be found first or last to represent the heavenly state. All elements of wonder produced upon the mind by the supernatural are got together to throw their train of lights and shadows upon the great vague Hereafter. Thus the heavenly state is represented to us by taking, as it were, all the elements that men have learned to esteem as indicative of power, and grandeur, and glory, and purity, and then making a heaven out of them.

Bring me, if you please, one of Titian's most magnificent pictures—the Martyrdom, or the Assumption, or any of those master pieces on which his fame stands. I look at it, and say to my companion, "What is that?" "That," he says, "is the Virgin." What is that deepest and most glowing of reds?" "That is her gorgeous robe." "What is that exquisite blue, further up upon her shoulders?" "That is her scarf." "What is that green that I see behind her?" "That is a tree with leaves on it." "What is it that I see through the tree?" "That is the sky." No, it is not. I go up to the picture and scrape it, and that red is nothing but pigment; and that blue is nothing but a little metal and oil. There is no robe and no scarf there at all. I scrape off one of those leaves, and there is no juice in it. It is metal and oil, and that is all. And that sky—you can pinch it, and scratch it, and

crumble it in your hand. It is all dirt—nothing but dirt. And yet, out of these base substances, by the cunning hand and imagination of the artist, is wrought a picture such that, when you look upon it, you never will think of what it is made up of—you will not see the pigment, nor the metal, nor the oil. These things, to the looker on, are garment, are face, are flesh. They seem to be a living being clothed in beautiful garments, though in reality they are but dead matter.

All the world is a vast pallet, and all human experiences are so many pigments, and the method of teaching which God pursues, in the New Testament, is that he, as the sublime Artist, takes this pallet of universal experience and draws in gorgeous colors the lines and lineaments of the heavenly state. And the things which he uses are all earthly, and are not to be reproduced in heaven, though the things which they represent to us are heavenly. The materials out of which our conceptions spring are earthly experiences; but the effect of the conceptions, when combined with the Spirit of God upon the imagination of man, is to reveal to him, and bring him into sympathy with, the invisible and spiritual life, as it could be done by no philosophical process. He who understands heaven, therefore, understands it altogether through the experience and interpretation of his imagination.

In general, it may be said that by these methods of great and wondrous truth which we learn in regard to heaven, is set forth the sweet and beautiful nature of God, whom some have worshipped as a devil, some as a terrific thunderer, some as a bloody hero, and some as an august and terrible emblem of justice, crushing unmercifully. At last we see God enshrined in the midst of joy and purity, and transcendant bliss. He himself gives the light. There is no need of the sun. There is no need of the moon. All natural laws may cease, because their Prototype is there. And as the earth itself is but the expression of divine thought, and its life is but the expression of the divine law, so when we rise above it altogether into the heavenly state, we shall find that God is nature; and that all things are in him; and that nature is perpetual summer, perpetual garden, perpetual feast, perpetual joy, perpetual bliss, and benediction forever and forever. That truth we have learned. But how? By making it up out of all these scattered images. We come to that conception of God through these varied experiences. It is in this way that we learn the blessedness of manhood. For the representation of heaven is not that you are going to be happy. You that are sucking out happiness in this world; you paupers that are running after happiness like a beggar with his hat, for a dole; you in youth that are running after happiness; you that in middle age are running after happiness; heaven is not meant to complete that fantasy, and leave you to feel that you are just to be happy. Heaven teaches you

that when manhood has been perfected by endurance and suffering, when it has been washed by tears and blood, and is redeemed and brought into its true estate, then it is blessed, as God is blessed. Heaven is the place where God is revealed in the plenitude of his power and glory, and where true manhood is interpreted to us in its glory.

It is further revealed (and the revelation is cautionary, as it were) that the heavenly land is one in which former things shall have passed away; in which the peculiar besetments and trials and incidental relations that shall have existed in this world will have disappeared.

We have a new state, a new life, a new chance. The particulars we do not know. What we do know is that it will be intensely active, and transcendently satisfying. And this knowledge ought to be a satisfaction in this life.

So much is the substance of that which is taught of the heavenly state. I might make it rich by endless combinations and specifications; but this is the general ground. It covers the revelation of the nature of God, and the revelation of the coming nature of man, and the revelation of the effacement of all the things with which we are most sadly acquainted in this world, and the substitution of the things which are the most rapturous and joyous in the world to come.

3. From this structural view, we may derive an idea of the uses to which we can put heaven, and also of the uses to which we can put the word of God. What a fantastic history is that of the interpretation of the enigmatical books of the Bible? And what a strange literature there is afloat—I beg pardon, literature which will not float, but whose intrinsic gravity carries it to the bottom in every age! One would think, to hear some persons interpret Daniel, and the symbols contained in that book; one would think, to hear some men preach on these prophetic symbols and interpretations, "I do not know that I shall be able to see, or hear, or eat, or drink naturally." It seems to me that it is a phantasmagoria which fits a man for a celestial lunatic asylum! Take the prophesy in respect to the beasts and their horns, and their tongues, and their eyes; take the various parts of the Apocalypse, and the various accounts of fantastic commentators, and see what work has been made in attempting to reduce these pictures to physiological ideas and statistical facts. Suppose a man should undertake to reduce the writings of John Milton to the language of mathematics, what sort of poetry would he have? Suppose one should take the productions of Keats or Tennyson and interpret them into the language of statistics, and prune everything down, and bring everything within the limits of bald, bare, barren facts? Would there be anything left of the poetry? Would you see what the poet meant that you should see? Would not you be cheated and fooled? What are these prophecies, these pictures

of the Apocalypse? They are what not long ago the North star was to the poor fugitive slave, who followed it, and saw in it liberty. He did not know what the orb was. All he knew was, that so long as he followed it bondage lay behind and liberty lay before. And he prayed, "O God! let me never be without this star." And he followed it, and found freedom.

Now, the Apocalypse is, so to speak, God's northern lights. All the auroral glory of heaven, as it were, flashes out in these various symbolisms. What have I, to tell me the doctrine of the future state? Not the language of philosophical fact. But to tell me that there is a heaven, and that it is more glorious and transcendent than the heart of man can conceive, is to fire my imagination, and to fill it with gorgeous pictures, and to pervade it with such an inflammation that it never can rest, crowning my fancy more than it awakens my reason. That which gives reason its glory and its beauty is the imagination. That is the most refining and civilizing faculty, and traces of it abound in these prophetic books. And although they are incidental, they may reveal important facts relating to the future, which otherwise would remain obscure. And it was not so much statistics that the divine Spirit wanted to give, as it was fire to the imagination, which should awaken faith in God, in hope, in love, in manhood, in the midst of the disturbances of this world—in the midst of its groans and anguish. It was necessary that there should be somewhere rejoicings among the cryings of earth. If there were wadings in blood on earth, there ought to be somewhere garments washed white in blood. If there were tears, there should be somewhere a Father who took in his everlasting arms his children, and wiped the tears from their eyes, and set them down everlastingly where tears should come no more.

But none of these visions of the coming glory are literal. There are no literal gates of pearl. There is no literal sea of glass. There is no literal pavement of gold. But ah! what is a great deal better, these figures of the heavenly land come with rejoicing and real happiness; and they teach us of the estate which we long for, and look forward to. It is not enough that I get from other sources. My manhood will not explain itself. I shall not die when I die; and everything in me that is most noble—my reason and my moral sense—goes, on the wings of these mighty pictures of the imagination, triumphing over darkness, and saying, "Light, *light*, LIGHT for me!" Let those go to the bat that will. I go to the empyrean.

A true use, then, of Scripture, is not to be made by going to it with a literal representation of its symbols, after they have become by use worn out. The great trouble with symbols is that they first help, and then hinder. When they are new and fresh, they interpret new

ideas to us; but after they have done it a certain time, they cease to do it, and become objective themselves, and we see the symbol—not the truth. It is quite possible for the Bible to stand right in the way of the understanding of the Bible. If a man comes to think of heaven, not according to this principle which I have explained, through the general interpreting of the spirit and state of it, and he is constantly thinking about palms, and crowns, and harps, and harpers, he comes at last to believe that they are actually true. And so he has used the Bible in such way that it has defeated itself.

A true use of Scripture, therefore, is to repeat its process with the materials which belong to our age and civilization; to do over again in our day, and with the things which are the noblest and best to us, just what the seer did in his day by the things which were best to that age of the world. Some things will continue to be best to the end of time. There are some things in the Apocalypse that have become glorious, and that are worthy of a place on the pallet. But our conceptions must have in them fewer princes. I do not myself think so much of princes. Heavenly princes may be good, but earthly princes do not give me the conception of heavenly princes. When I read of crowns, it does not produce much impression on my mind; for I have seen them. Neither is much impression produced on my mind by reading about thrones; for I have sat down in some of them. I have a very poor idea of thrones, and a poorer idea yet of those men that press them. I am a Republican. God, by his providence, has given me a very different conception of dignity and manhood from that which was held by the oriental nations. And while, in a large part of the civilized world, crowns and princes are doing a great deal of real service to you and me, democratic republicans—or republican democrats!—other figures must come in to crutch up these infirm ones. Time has riddled them, and let their glory out. There are more of the common people that want less aristocrats, fewer palaces, more cottages, less oriental sensuous gorgeousness, more simple domesticity, less being governed,—not less government, but more *self*-government.

The glory which God has unfolded of himself, the developments of later times to us, will go further to interpret the heavenly state than even the antique figures. I hold that it is the the duty of Christians to imitate, not the letter, but the spirit, of revelation. As the method of revelation was to teach us of the heavenly state, by appealing to the imagination, and gathering figures that would represent power, and purity, and excellence of every kind, so we may, when we wish to fashion a heaven for our edification, gather up all the elements which to us are transcendent, whether they be scriptural or not. We are not restricted in this regard. We are at liberty to make our own

heaven. The maiden has a right to make a heaven that will represent to her purity, power, heroism, goodness and grandeur, in their most ideal forms. And the mother may construct her heaven out of the materials which God has gathered about her experience. And it is a part of the liberty of the Christian to interpret for himself the shining way, and the glorious city that stands at the head of it. And it were well for us that we had more fruitfulness, and were not tied up to an eternal repetition. "He that sticks at the letter sticks at the bark," is the old Latin proverb; and I say that he who sticks at words, and keeps them, in these Apocalyptic visions, not only "sticks at the bark," but loses that living principle by which every man may make a vision which shall bring heaven nearer to him than any other man's figure.

It may seem shocking for me to say that, if you please, you may, instead of taking the pictures employed by Scripture to represent heaven, take your own images and figures, and make your own heaven; but you do it, after all. When you were young, your heaven was purely scriptural; but it is not so any longer. When you think of heaven now, the Mary that comes to your mind is not a Mary of the Apocalypse, but that darling Mary who first brought you toward heaven. She went up to the spirit land, and there she shines; and since she has been there heaven has had one thing in it which you never read of in the Bible. And after your own old father, prophet, priest, lover and friend to you, and the benefactor of all who came within his influence, went thither, you have never thought of heaven without pushing aside one of the old symbols, and putting this new one in its place. Your daughter is there, and your father is there; and your brother goes next, and your sister next; and the old neighbor goes, and the dear matron goes; and heaven begins to get full of people that you have known; and pretty soon you will find that you have a heaven formed out of your own experience, with the aid of your imagination. And yet, if I tell men that this is the thing to do; if I tell them that they may form their own conception of the heavenly land, not setting aside the Bible, but taking a hint from it, and proceeding according to its method, and calling into action the same moral qualities which it does, but employing illustrations and figures different from those which it employs, they are sometimes shocked. Nevertheless, God makes their hearts wiser than their heads. That is the case with a great many who otherwise would be absolute fools!

The reasons, then, of the indefiniteness of the teaching of the New Testament become apparent. I suppose that one of those reasons lies in the absolute impossibility of conveying a literal knowledge of heaven to us. There must be a pictorial representation of heaven, or we can gain no conception of it. We are not developed; we are not experi-

enced; we are far removed from the highest condition of those natures which we bear, and we are not prepared to see the things which belong to the spirit life. We see them as through a glass, darkly. Only by and by can we see face to face, and know just how heaven is.

The same thing exists among ourselves. For instance, the lower classes in society (by which I mean, not the poorer classes, but those who are less developed, the gross, the animal, and even the vicious and the corrupt) cannot interpret nor understand the higher stages of society. They cannot understand the real condition of a pure and virtuous and refined family. If they give their idea of it, you will see that they smouch it in their descriptions by their own vulgar notions. In other words, the bottom of society never can understand the top, although the top can understand clear down to the bottom. The higher development always judges that which is below it, though the higher understanding always includes that which is below it, the lower never includes that which is above it. So that we cannot interpret that which is above us, though that which is above us interprets us.

But a moral reason might be given of this; viz., that if it were possible for men to understand the blessedness of the state that is to come, it might be a snare. It might enervate and invalidate the motives to virtue in this life. We are here to grow. We are here to learn. We are here to suffer. We are here to be wrought upon, and wrought in, and wrought out; and life is a growing place, a studying place, a suffering place. Whatever happens, you can be clean of lip and pure of heart. But after all, you are strangers and pilgrims. You are seeking for yourselves; but you will never find yourselves this side of the grave. No man lives here. We are only sojourners in this sphere. Our life is not perfected here. It is the ideal of honor, and truth, and purity, and fidelity, and love, that man should die fruitful and abundant as is the stream of life. It is the ideal of our higher selves—that is, our *real* selves. For, after all, that which we sleep with, and eat with, and walk with, and commune with, is not our true self. We are masked and hidden and imprisoned in the flesh. Our true self is coming hereafter.

That being the case, it were not wise that the heavenly state should be revealed to men. It were not wise that those things should be made apparent which call into exercise the reason and the imagination. The true meaning of heaven to us is the certainty of general blessedness. For instance, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." It is a certainty of satisfaction in the divine government and in the divine nature. We shall be satisfied when we see him as he is. It is our refuge from sorrow. It is our great comfort and consolation, forecasting in this world. Above all, it is that which settles the endless inequalities of experience in this life. It is sure, and it is the only sure

thing. All things which are physical, and which men call substantial, are passing away. The things that are seen are transient, and the things that are unseen, and only those, are permanent. No great nature has ever lived through life and not felt that this world was insufficient for him. The world is big enough, and good enough, and rich enough for children till they have reached a certain estate; but the moment they begin to enter upon manhood, they are conscious of a desire for what are called romances and visions that the world will never satisfy. And the longer they live, the less they will be satisfied; and the probability is that they will grow misanthropic. And the wine has turned to vinegar in a man when he becomes a misanthrope. And the next step is putrid fermentation, in wine or in men. And yet, every man is conscious that the more he knows men, the more he pities them; the more sorry he is for them; and the more charitable toward them. But, after all, consider what is the real condition of man, and of the human mind. All honors, one after another, are not less than honors; all pleasures, one after another, are not less than pleasures; but they do not go down into the deep places of human desire. And all these things are not sufficient to feed him when the growth of manhood brings hunger in his nobler nature.

It is necessary that we should stay ourselves with this faith, that there is a land where our whole heart shall be filled to overflowing, forever and forever; and that that land is heaven. You may fret, otherwise. You may find fault with the conditions of this life. Travelers find fault with taverns, and with railway carriages, and with stages, and with wagons; but they are foolish; for they are not going to live in them.

When I go to Europe I find fault with the ship, with the engine, and with the everlasting ocean; but then what do I do? I lie down on my back, and charge ten days to profit and loss, and wipe them out, and that is the end of it. But I know that when I get there I shall be paid a thousand times over for all I have suffered.

When a man is on the sea, and is sea-sick, he says, "I would not go through this another day for ten thousand continents, if I could help it;" but when he reaches land and sees one thing that is worth seeing, he says, "I would go ten voyages for the sake of seeing this." It is not wise for a man to put too much emphasis upon the incidental experiences of life.

Servants and landlords say that they can always tell how a man lives at home by the way he conducts himself abroad. If he finds fault with his food, they say, "It is because he has not good food at home"; and if he eats his food contentedly, "It is because he lives well at home". It means this, that a man who is used to good things, and knows that

he shall have them again, says, "What is the use of my finding fault with that which is disagreeable on the way. It is only for a moment. I shall go right back to everything that I need." And so he is a gentleman. A man that finds fault is not. And on the way heavenward, if you find fault with your house, and with your position in society, and with the table, which God spreads for you, you are no gentleman. But if you are well bred, you are sons of God; and by this token it shall be known that you have, and you may be certain that you have, a Father's house, where you shall have experiences that will remove all these little inequalities. "This dust, this heaving ship, this sickness," you say, "is but for a moment; and why should I complain? It is but a mere speck, and not worthy of a thought. Mine is eternity; mine is heaven; mine is God."

So, too, not only is there comfort for the breaking up of our relationships on earth by death, but I declare to you that after having, by reason of my profession, pondered this subject to comfort mourners all my life long—during the thirty-five years of my ministry—I am more and more personally satisfied every single year, that if for this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. And I tell you truly, that if I were to be convinced to-morrow that this is all a fiction, that there is no existence beyond the grave, I would seal my mouth with the seven seals of the Apocalypse, which no man could break open, before I would whisper that guilty disclosure. In this world of sin, he that takes away the hope of heaven, takes away the consolation of those that sorrow. There is nothing else that can comfort a heart crushed by bereavement and losses.

It is but for a moment. Out of my tree the bird has flown, and sings there no more. But it sits in the tree of life and sings, and I shall hear it again. I am alone; I have no counsellor; I am without a companion; I am heart-sick and life-sick—but what then? I shall find again all that I have lost, and more, and more blessedly. Sorrows, as storms, bring down the clouds close to the earth; sorrows bring heaven down close; and they are instruments of cleansing and purifying. I have seen many a man that was not true to his philosophy, and whose theory broke down at the side of the grave, because he could not endure the belief that he was burying what he had loved; and who said, "Is my child like a clock when some chance shot has passed through it? Is my child like a shattered clock, that kept time until it was struck, and then ceased, and shall never keep time again?" Never was there such an engine of torment as this world; never was there such a miserable thing as men with such susceptibilities, and in whom sorrows so beat like waves of the sea on the shore of experience, if there is no balm, no hope, and no future.

But now, with a heaven, my sorrows are but for a moment, and I comfort myself, and I carry my child again in my arms. The family that I have with me is not so large as the family that wait for me. The friends that are round about me are not so many as the friends that surely will give me a choral entrance into the heavenly land. And heaven is the comfort of bereavement. Those that are afflicted, and that bear the yoke for the sake of love, look up. There is a land of recompensing love; and out of that draw argument of patience and of gladness.

So the sadness of old age is greatly cheered and comforted by the same thing. Every man who sees a tree going into the winter, cannot, I suppose, if he has any sentiment, but have a certain sort of sadness. When looking out from my little cottage porch, I see the first change in the leaves, the first faint color, I always sigh, and say, "Ah! there it is; Autumn is coming." And Autumn, you know, means what comes after. It means brightness; it means gorgeous crimsons; it means magnificent browns, ochres, yellows; it means everything that is beautiful on the mountain, and in the sky, and on the field; but ah! do not I know that the sweet whispering wind that brings to my senses the sound of the leaves of those trees, is but the precursor of that hoarse, harsh wind that is already traveling from the poles, and is to bring frost and snow? And when I see my noble old trees, that were so full of life of their own, and the life of birds in the summer, at last having shaken off their garments, and standing all bare, I cannot help feeling sad, and pitying them. But I know that there is a resurrection for them. They are not dead. They only sleep. When the spring comes again, the birds will come back and nest in them once more. And when I see the old drawing near to the grave; when I see those who have had part and lot in the affairs of life, obliged to go with feebler step, and obliged to perform fewer functions, my heart is filled with sadness for them.

When the time comes, which cannot be long delayed, dear friends, when you shall look upon me unable to stand in this place, with my grey hair white, and another preaching in my stead, and I with palsied hand shaking with age, and scarcely able to pronounce the benediction, you will say, "I remember him in the day of his power. I remember what labors he performed, and how he spoke in loud and manly tones of instruction. But he is an old man, now; he is passing off, and others must take his place.

There is something very sad in that It is sad to me. It was sad to me to see it in my father. It is sad to you to see it in your father or your pastor. But it is with men as it is with trees. The time is not long from November to March. It is but a step from

old age into a youth that shall never know old age. It is only the outward part that is wasting; for, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

This is the consolation of those that grow old. If you are going further and further from the bright things of the world, you are coming nearer and nearer to those brighter things which the world has helped you to interpret. Look up, and be willing that others should take your place. I am glad that I have had the chance to work, and have tried to put into my work such strength as God gave me; and when God calls me away, I shall go out of my work just as willingly as I came into it. For I have a heavenly home. Whatever may become of me, I have my hope laid up in heaven. That is my joy. That is my strength. That is my consolation in every trial. It is the continual interfusion of this hope and imagination of heaven, it is the light of the other sphere, that makes me cheerful and courageous and indomitable in the day of trial.

Christian brethren, do you make enough use of heaven? I do not rebuke, nor do I criticise the ways in which you are accustomed to look upon the spirit world. This is your matter. If I can help you I am glad, but if I cannot, you have the same liberty. He that has the true way of looking at heaven, will, I think, be better, stronger, more patient, more manly. He has no right conception of heaven whose heaven makes him effeminate. He has the true idea of heaven, whose heaven makes him bold, strong, enduring, sweet, gentle, humble, teachable, and Christlike.

And now may God grant that every one of us may look, not alone at the Scriptures, but through the Scriptures into life itself, that we may fashion to ourselves a companionable heaven, so near to us that it shall distil celestial influence upon us. May there be none in this great assembly who shall fail, at last, of heaven, without God and without hope, living in darkness and uncertainty in this life, dying blindly, and rising only to lose the heritage of eternal glory. How miserable a lot is that!—especially when all the powers above, all divine influences, have been shed forth that men may know, and that they may choose, and that they may take hold inseparably upon that better part which shall not be taken from them. A rest is promised. See that ye come not short of this rest through unbelief.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Through darkness and through light, through storm and through calm, knowing our way, or lost, and searching it again, we are seeking our home, O Father! We are striving to rise above those temptations into which we were born, where is our apprenticeship, our school. We are striving, not to despise the flesh, and yet not to be subject to it; not to despise the riches of the beauty of the earth upon which we tread, and yet not to abuse it or to become enslaved to it. We are seeking to free ourselves from the thrall of passion, and yet not to lose the energy of the power which comes from it. We desire to behold the truths which cannot be seen by mortal eyes; and yet not to be carried away from the commerce of this world. Thou art unfolding in us a royal nature whose metes and bounds we do not discern; whose very path is unrevealed; but this we know, that as in summer, in light and heat, every plant, ignorant as it is, knows how to find its own full self, so if we are the children of light and love, thou thyself wilt develop in us the character most needed. We can help ourselves but very little. We can resist evil. We can take pains to get the light and come into thy presence. But we do not know the plan, and we do not know how to build, and we are surrounded with so many adverse influences that if it were not for our faith in thee, we should give up and drift as the currents carry us.

But now, O Lord our God, thou hast made us to believe that thou art. Thou hast taught us that thou art a God of love to all that accept thee in loving. And we have accepted thee. Thou art our Father, and thou shalt be our exceeding great reward. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt keep that which we have committed to thee, and which thou didst first commit to us—our souls. We believe that thou wilt fashion them so that through all imperfections and in spite of them, through all temptations and in spite of them, through all sins and in spite of them, and through weakness and infirmities, we shall at last come off victorious, and be received home, and be known there, as we are longed for already, and have our names mentioned. And we shall be as the sons of light, and shall go forth in an eternal liberty and power, the conception of which hath not entered upon time.

We are, O Lord God! still walking veiled. We feel in ourselves, at times, the motions of the gods; and yet we are dethroned; we are outcasts; we are exiled; we are without sceptre or crown—without kingdom or authority; we are waiting for our coronation. Thou, O Lord our God, wilt yet bring us home and crown us and instate us in power and purity and love and joy, forevermore.

And now we pray that we may have the faith of this coming love so strong that it shall throw down upon the glare of this life a tempering influence, that we may not be too much enamored of things seen, which perish in the using, nor too easily forget things unseen which only are permanencies. We pray that thou wilt grant that we may have such a sense of coming gladness and joy in the land of rest, that we may not too much estimate the pleasures of this life, nor too greedily grasp after its riches, nor sacrifice too much for its honors. And yet we do not desire to be so much engrossed in the thoughts of the life to come that we shall take no pains with this life. We desire to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord in the life that now is, that peradventure we may be admitted to the higher service and greater blessedness of the life that is to come. We pray that thou wilt help us out of our comforts and consolations to interpret all our disappointments by the way, and all our bereavements. As we see one and another staff and stay breaking; as one and another fountain grows dry; as one and another cord that vibrated snaps, and as we find ourselves strangers and pilgrims with growing need, O grant that we may not feel the desolateness of life and society to be evidence of the hopelessness of that for which we are living. Help us evermore to

live by faith and not by sight. How great is the company of those that surround us! How great are the clouds of victorious spirits that are our spectators! Who is there that hath not more than tongue can count of those spirits of love that wait and watch for him? We pray that our treasure, though it be invisible and yet unrealized, may make us glad, and that we may not be afraid of that outward poverty which men so much disesteem. And grant that if we be in weakness, and even in sickness, and cast down, and laid aside from the tasks of life, from the sight of men, we may yet live in the presence of that higher sphere where we are to be princes of power. And so may we nourish ourselves at the breast of the future. So may we fix our faith upon heavenly hope. So may we seek consolation in trouble from things that would mislead us. Grant that we may walk above the world while we are walking upon it. If our feet do tread the ground, may our head move among the stars. May we be lifted up so that we shall evermore hear the voices of time and the voices of eternity, and interpret the one in the language of the other, and measure all things below, not by the false measurings of men's imperfect judgment, but by the golden reed of thy sanctuary.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing upon us to-day. It hath already been a good day to our souls. The morning came as the opening of the temple of God. We have worshipped thee and rejoiced in thee. And we stand now to give thanks for the day, and still to hope that thou wilt shake the tree of life, and that its fruit may fall and be gathered through all the hours of this blessed day.

We pray for the children; and we beseech of thee that they may grow up in Christian families, with sweetness of temper and purity of conscience, and a lordly manliness—even that lordliness which comes from God.

We pray that thou wilt bless all parents, and especially those that are almost afraid of their task, and that come with awe and fear and trembling to the rearing of these immortals that thou hast given to them. We pray that thou wilt strengthen and guide them. For thou art their Father, even more gloriously than they are parents to their own children.

We pray that thou wilt bless all our efforts to instruct the rising generation. Bless our Sabbath-school, and all its officers. Bless those who are gathered from our own midst and from the community at large into our schools and classes. We thank thee that the dews of divine grace have rested upon the young, and that so many are converted to God, and walk worthy of their vocation. And we pray that this year may be a year full of blessings—not outward blessings alone; not blessings to the eye, nor to pride, nor to vanity, but inward blessings—blessings of the heart; blessings which cleanse and lift men's natures and purify their souls. May the new birth pass upon many, and may there be the voices never ceasing in our midst of those who rejoice in the newness of life, and chant the praises of God who hath redeemed them by his own precious blood.

Bless all the Churches in our midst, and thy servants that minister in them. Be with all those that labor for the elevation of morals in these great cities, and for those who seek to inspire justice throughout our land, and for those who endeavor to stay the progress of corruption and to beat down the might of those who employ their power for greed.

We pray for all those men who love truth and virtue. May their voices rise higher than all other sounds; and into their natures may the power come; and may this nation learn what prosperity there is in righteousness, purity and peace. And while other nations are tossed to and fro as we have lately been; while they shrink with dread from the cup whose contents are blood, which we have but just taken to our lips, grant that we may not look upon them with a cold eye or an unsympathizing heart; but as even we cried out for ourselves, "How long, O Lord! how long?" so we call unto thee in behalf of the nations of the earth, and pray that thy pitying eye may look upon their adversity. O grant that the day may come when

knowledge and true religion shall destroy oppression and superstition, and all hurtful and hateful power; and when men shall learn to love one another, and the common people of the nations shall refuse to be led against their brothers, and the whole earth shall at last find peace and purity and gladness.

Grant these things, not because we are worthy to ask them, but for thine own name's sake. And to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit shall be praises everlasting. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Grant unto us, our Heavenly Father, that blessing which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow. Take us up into the bosom of thy love. Be to us, we beseech of thee, a tabernacle, a pavilion, where we may be hid till the storm is overpast. May we not trust to our own ingenuity, nor stand in our own natural firmness. May we live in God. May we know that we shall triumph in him. May we rest in God, and do good, and fear not. Grant more and more, as we grow older and need to have the world enlarged, that the horizon may move before us. Grant that the vision may so come near that we cannot tell where the earth stops or heaven begins; and that thus we may go from glory to glory, until we stand in Zion and before God.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

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